

BOLTON (H.C.)

# A MODERN ORACLE AND ITS PROTOTYPES

## A Study in Catoptromancy

BY

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READ AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE AMERICAN  
FOLK-LORE SOCIETY, HELD IN BOSTON  
DECEMBER 28-29, 1892

*C. W. H.*  
*Reprinted from Journal of American Folk-Lore*  
*Vol. VI., No. 1, 1893*



NEW YORK  
Author's Edition

1893





## A MODERN ORACLE AND ITS PROTOTYPES.

## A STUDY IN CATOPTROMANCY.

THE high-priest of Israel, when conducting the ancient elaborate ritual, was arrayed in richly ornamented vestments and symbols of his sacred office. The ephod was "embroidered in colors," and fastened on the shoulders by two clasps of onyx set in gold, and at the waist by a girdle; over this the priest wore the "breastplate of judgment," made of "gold of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen," folded square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width. In this was set four rows of precious stones, each engraved with the name of one of the tribes of Israel, and it was secured by means of two "wreathen chains of gold," connected with "two rings at the ends of the breastplate."

Within this brilliantly decorated breastplate were placed the "Urim and the Thummim."

Our certain knowledge of these objects is very meagre; the words signify "lights and perfections," and are always in the plural number. They are mentioned but a few times in the Scriptures, and are never described, either because they were familiar objects to the people, or because their sacred character made secrecy expedient. Their use, however, is clearly recorded; they were consulted by the high-priest on rare occasions to ascertain the will of Jehovah, and they gave oracular responses. How this was accomplished is not stated, and the question has led scholars to offer many conflicting conjectures. To enumerate these surmises and opinions is no part of my plan, but it may be interesting to note the supposition of Professor Plumptre, as it links the ancient Urim and Thummim with the "Modern Oracle."

Professor Plumptre thinks the Urim to have been a clear and colorless stone set in the breastplate as a symbol of light, corresponding to the mystic scarab in the pectoral plate of the ancient Egyptian priests; and the Thummim, he thinks, was an image answering to that worn by the priestly judges of Egypt as a symbol of truth and purity of motive. By gazing steadfastly on these objects the priest may have been thrown into a half ecstatic or trance-like state, akin to the hypnotic condition, in which he lost personal consciousness, and received spiritual illumination and insight.

Under the Mosaic dispensation and under the Judges, the Urim and Thummim seem to have been in use; under the monarchy they are mentioned but once, and in an interesting connection. When King Saul was hard pressed by his old enemies the Philistines, he lost courage, and sought by divers agents to learn the outcome of the

approaching conflict ; these agents were dreams, Urim, and prophets, and when they all failed he resorted to the unlawful step of consulting the woman with a familiar spirit at En-dor.

In the days of Ezra and of Nehemiah, we are told that certain events shall not come to pass "until there stand up a priest with Urim and Thummim." Since this remote period, the practical use of these as a means of divination has ceased ; but I was recently informed by an intelligent, skilled workman, occasionally in my service, that the use of Urim has not been lost, as commonly imagined ; that he himself is accustomed to appeal to them, and to receive oracular responses.

On my expressing interest (not doubt) in his extraordinary statement, he gave me the details here recorded, and soon after brought me a dark mirror, which he claims serves him as an oracle in a manner analogous to the ancient Urim and Thummim.

This modern oracle is a plain glass backed with some jet-black material, with a neat border bevelled and gilded ; it is mounted on a simple wooden support, such as is used for photographs. The glass measures  $6\frac{5}{8}$  by  $3\frac{3}{8}$  inches ; the surface is plane, and reflects dimly the features of one looking at it, or bright objects in the room, like any other black mirror. This glass is one of many he has himself manufactured. Unwilling to part with this particular mirror, owing to its efficiency, my informant subsequently gave me (for a consideration) a larger one measuring  $9\frac{1}{2}$  by 7 inches.

This "Mirror of Light" enables those possessing the gift of clairvoyance to read communications from the great ones in the Spirit World.

The method of using this glass is as follows : Two persons, one a "positive" and the other a "negative," go together into a perfectly dark room ; the "positive" holds the glass in two hands, the thumb of each being at the back of the glass, and the four fingers of each hand being applied to the mirrored surface, "so that electricity may pass from one hand into the glass and out by the other hand." The two persons, positive and negative, for convenience may take seats, but they must not touch each other. The negative, or medium (as my informant often called her), then gazes intently at the dark mirror, and visions and writings appear more or less clearly on its surface. The writings are in letters of divers colors ; "red is the lowest, white higher in purity, and golden light is supreme." Sometimes strange characters of unknown languages appear. The communications come faster than they can be written down, and three hours together on occasions. My informant usually writes the messages in the dark room on a pad, and copies them out at his leisure. Sometimes the writing appears backward, the last letter of the mes-



sage being the first ; sometimes the writing appears upside down, and this is the peculiarity of the smaller "Urim" above described.

Questioned further, my informant said "the thing acts electrically," and stated that the presence of any animal which is naturally electric, as a cat or a horse (!), "which is full of electricity," is of great advantage. For a similar reason, a catskin behind the mirror greatly increases its power ; "the Egyptians, you know, worshipped the cat, owing to its great electrical action." Greater success is attained on some days in the week than on others ; Friday is a bad day, because evil spirits appear in the mirror unbidden ; Sunday is more satisfactory.

My informant, whom I shall now designate as Mr. H., says, although he makes the glasses himself, it is impossible to determine beforehand how they will turn out ; that is, whether a certain glass will prove a good "Urim" or a failure. Some have much greater power than others. Concave glasses are especially strong ; in fact he has abandoned this form, because the light coming from them is so strong as to injure the eyes of the medium.

Mr. H. further stated in reply to questions, that, in order to read the mirror successfully, the seer must get into an exalted state ; that his own desires avail nothing ; in his own family Mr. H. acts as the positive and his wife as the negative, she being a good medium under his influence. The most successful seers, as a class, are young Jewish girls of German parentage ; and Mr. H. suggested that a convenient way for me to test the mirrors would be to take them to a Jewish asylum and borrow a child.

Asked how he first learned the use of the mirror, Mr. H. rather vaguely said : "The power came to us soon after the death of our child." This child was a girl of nine years of age, concerning whose death-bed experiences Mr. H. speaks with great feeling and mysticism. On another occasion he said that a certain Faulkner, who communicates through the mirror, had instructed him in its use.

Mr. H. regards the power of seeing and conversing with spirits as the highest gift possessed by man ; he himself is not permitted to enjoy this privilege, but he is able to read by Urim, an easier though less noble science of communicating with the spirit world. He constantly compares it with telegraphing, and talks volubly of the "electrical" agencies by which the seer is assisted.

Mr. H. makes use of the Urim to guide his daily life, consulting the spirits of many noted men. Formerly Michael Angelo was his monitor, but the great Italian genius left him, and now Mr. H. is advised by Daniel Webster. On medical questions he has the aid of Dr. Abernethy, whose prescriptions, as revealed by the mirror, he has had compounded and used for an invalid friend.

He gains through the glass much surprising information not vouchsafed to the public; some of this he communicated to me. St. Paul has informed him of the real "thorn in the flesh" with which the apostle was vexed; this signifies the abandonment of Paul by his early friends. After his conversion to Christianity his Jewish friends turned against him, and this constituted a lifelong "thorn in the flesh."

Mr. H. further said that as soon as he heard of the arrival in New York of the Egyptian obelisk, he perceived a grand opportunity of securing some light on the hieroglyphics by aid of the "Urim." Uncertain how to obtain a piece of the granite, the obelisk being still afloat, he was impelled to call on a stranger (to him) living in — Square, and, before making his errand known, this gentleman offered him the desired treasure. With this fragment of the obelisk in his possession he consulted the Urim, and learned that the existing translations are all incorrect, — that the obelisk was erected as a memorial to Joseph, and its presence in the United States now denotes seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine.

Mr. H. loaned me a manuscript book of 38 pages, in which he had recorded from time to time during the past twenty years such communications as seemed worthy of preservation. The pages are written in a tolerable hand, and contain short communications from distinguished persons, chiefly Old Testament characters; among them I noted the following: Jeroboam, Solomon, Samuel, Moses, Jeremiah, Lot, Joshua, Isaac, Saul, Elijah, Daniel, and "Selah," which Mr. H. stated is the name of David, as well as St. Luke, Jude, St. Peter, and St. Paul; also, Lincoln's assassin, Wilkes Booth, and Henry the Fifth.

Critically examined, these communications, with a few exceptions to be noted, are a series of rhapsodies having a strong religious tone; they contain little that can be construed as information, and seem to reflect the ideas of the person receiving them rather than those which the relator might presumably hold. The language bears some resemblance to that of the Holy Bible, but is occasionally ungrammatical. Perhaps this fault is due to haste in transcribing.

A message from Jeroboam: —

Behold the light giveth wisdom; behold the light giveth joy; behold the poor profiteth therein. Look well to the heavens, thou shalt then behold the mighty power; behold none can behold the sun. As the power cometh upon them it beareth them down to the earth, behold they cry for relief; behold they that hath the power freely giveth it to the poor. Behold it is as a lamp well lit. — JEROBOAM.

A brief communication from Selah, *i. e.* King David: —



Behold the great city.  
Behold the great wall.  
Behold the gate is as shut.  
Behold the key is as lost.  
Behold the Master cometh.  
Behold he turneth the key.  
Behold the gate is as open.  
Behold! Speak! Rejoice with the Father.  
Behold the Father abideth with his children. — SELAH.

**A vision and communication from St. Peter :—**

Green fields — Bird flies over it — Sheep eating grain, all with their heads down. Behold they look to the earth, therein is their glory. Behold they glory in that which is before them ; they rejoice ; behold they are as glad ; they care not for the morrow ; behold they are of the earth, earthy, they looked not upward.

Smoke — hill, gravelly — down the hill comes a man — robe — bare feet — goes to a field which is quite barren — looks up the hill — some poor lean sheep come around him — he has a rod — they gather round him. Behold ye the chosen ones. Behold, look ye well unto that which is before you. Behold they go into their pasture where sorrow entereth not. (The sheep all look at the man and follow him.) And joy dwelleth in their hearts. Speak I truly unto ye, behold they seeketh the light — the light draweth them — behold they seek not that which thou sawest firstly. Behold they seek not that which is as a dream, but that which giveth eternal joy. May peace and joy be with you, so say I. — ST. PETER.

**Communication from Henry the Fifth :—**

The Holy Catholic Church has not taken me to Heaven, prays for me one year and then [I am] forgotten. I am in darkness, but beyond me is a boundary of light : would that I could reach it.

Perhaps the most startling communication is that from the infamous Wilkes Booth, which, like most of those recorded, is very brief. It opens with a note concerning the vision : —

Man limps, etc. Assassination seems to be terrible to you, but it gave your country peace. Even my life had to go also, but you need another Booth to transfer some of the black-hearted villains to the endurable spheres. But I cannot come and do a mighty deed, can only come as a spherical power. However, there may another Booth turn up who may save your country. I have passed the dark abyss to the place which is the first advancement from the dark valley ; I can glide softly on the bright rays of light. — W. BOOTH.

The manuscript book from which these quotations are made is but one of dozens of similar character in the possession of Mr. H. I have hastily examined several hundred pages of writings, in which

I noted especially the signatures of Farragut, Tweed, Lazarus, Hannah, Longfellow, Furman Fox, and Jasper, the last two being not otherwise identified and unknown to Mr. H. The writings are almost entirely in the enigmatical, rhapsodical style of those cited, and are less striking than the visions; of the latter I transcribe two examples. The fragmentary style is due obviously to haste in recording:—

“Old withered hand. Depraved Powers. Little child's hand, with a bright silver chain, leads a little lamb. The withered hand has a rusty chain leading a fox whose tail is ablaze. Over the lamb it says: ‘Absent Powers leaving thine earth.’ Over the fox: ‘A new power taketh its place and draweth all glory from thine earth. Woe, woe, woe!’” Then follows the usual continuation of the fantasy.

A second vision: Moon, horns down; from one hangs a ball. Rock, man sitting down at foot of rock, writing. Sandy place; man sticks up a stick like a dragon, with a snake's tail around the hole. The succeeding rhapsody is signed “Hannah.”

A certain Faulkner instructs Mr. H. that the Mirror of Light should be shown only to a few specially favored persons “till a season; you will see many strange things; they will claim it. When you do [make the matter public], push it. I will come forward and speak on the glass; the glass needs no changing; change would weaken it. . . . The mirror is a good and true work.”

In August, 1880, Mr. H. began the publication of a monthly paper called “The Instructive Light,” in which to record the visions and messages read in the mirror. Vol. I., No. 1, of this very scarce literary curiosity lies before me as I write; it is a four-page paper, measuring 14 by 10 inches, three columns to a page. It opens with a brief dedicatory poem signed “D.,” which Mr. H. says stands for Dickens; this is followed by editorials and sundry articles, and on page three are a number of communications as received through the Mirror of Light. Other appropriate matter fills the fourth page, which concludes with the publisher's notice that the paper does not propose to gain support from advertisements, and can be had for one dollar a year. The paper was soon discontinued for lack of funds, but, as Mr. H. says, “it established a landmark.”

In this paper we learn that the “‘Mirror of Light’ is identical with the Thummim of the Israelites, used by Moses and the high priest as a means of communication with the Spirit Messengers.” That “messages are carried by the electric current, and are shown to us in letters of electric light, but from us the magnetic current also carries the vibrations, so that we in reality establish an electric telephone of great power which can be projected into a vast distance by means of a spiritual chord; our light, which is red, and the spirit



light, which is white, forming this chord. By means of this electric current projected into space, we are able to attract the opposite or negative current, and, as these currents attract each other powerfully until an equilibrium is established (during which time we have an opportunity of making use of said currents), we can both *receive* and *send* messages between the two worlds."

An editorial headed "Our Next Number" informs readers that a volcanic disturbance will take place in the Sandwich Islands, a very safe prediction, especially since no time-limit is given; and the following claim is made: "With this instrument we can bring before us as a picture any place on the earth, under the sea, or even unknown land of the North Pole," a statement identical with one made hundreds of years earlier, and which we shall cite presently.

Among the communications are several political prophecies, one of which, unfortunately for the veracity of the relator, has in the course of time proved false: the spirit of Lincoln informs the reader that Hancock will be the next President, and that he will prove a second Washington. Concerning the French nation we learn "there will be no more kings;" and "England will become a republic if the people can make it so."

A few words as to the individuality of my informant may not be out of place. Mr. H. was born in New York State about fifty years ago, and passed his early life in Brooklyn. He comes of a good family; his father was a physician, and his great-grandfather one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. He has seen a good deal of America, having spent some years in California. After the death of his nine-year-old child, he and his wife adopted two children, and he has said to me that if he were not a poor man he would adopt several more. He is a teetotaler by command of the spirits, and a deeply religious man, who honestly tries to live according to the Golden Rule.

On inquiring as to his church connection, he immediately expressed great contempt for churches of every denomination, saying he was superior to all human organizations, being in direct communication with spirits revealing the will of the Almighty. He considers that the religion of the Druids is the most perfect and regrets its decadence. His views on cosmogony are original; he claims that this earth is destroyed every 26,000 years and re-peopled, and that the sun is the blessed land of promise, for all of which he finds warrant in texts from the Holy Bible. He remarked quite casually, one day, that he had been three times on this earth before his present sojourn and was "really getting tired of it."

On remarking that the communications recorded in the MSS. above noted were chiefly religious in character, Mr. H. said that the

nature of the communications differed with individuals according to their personality ; or, as I should express it, the communications are factors of the personal equations of the seers. Formerly Mr. H. was in communication with the higher religious powers, but he now hears less frequently from them.

On expressing surprise at the necessity of working the Urim in the dark, Mr. H. at once reminded me that in the Hebrew Holy of Holies, in the Egyptian sanctuaries, Greek temples, and other shrines, the oracles were always given in darkness ; "besides, one is removed from all outside influences."

Mirrors have been used by necromancers and clairvoyants as a means of divination in all ages, and are the basis of the special art of Catoptromancy ; where, however, a crystal is used, it is called Crystallomancy, and, in the particular instance of a beryl, Beryllomancy.

Varro, the intimate friend of Cicero, claims this use of mirrors originated in Persia. Those consulting them were styled by the Romans *Specularii*. Pythagoras, the Greek mathematician, as early as 550 B. C., consulted a highly polished steel mirror at the full of the moon. The ill-fated Roman emperor, Didius Julianus (b. 133 A. D.), sought to ascertain by catoptromancy the issue of the battle about to take place between his general, Severus, and Tullius Crispinus ; in this case a child was brought to read in the mirror. Pausanias (150-200 A. D.) mentions a spring of water in front of the Temple of Ceres, at Patras, which was consulted by sick persons in the following manner : the invalid lowered a mirror into the spring by means of a cord, so that only the lower edge touched the water ; after praying to the goddess and burning incense the invalid looked into the mirror, and if his countenance appeared ghastly and distorted it was an ill omen ; but if his face was reflected in a natural and healthy way, his convalescence was indicated.

Pico della Mirandola, an Italian philosopher of the fifteenth century, claimed to be able to read the past, present, and future in a mirror manufactured under a favorable constellation, and examined at a suitable temperature of the body.

The eminent French physician, Jean Fernel, about fifty years later, wrote of a mirror in which persons appeared to him, and these persons would immediately do all that he commanded, their pantomime being readily comprehended by all who assisted at the demonstration.

In the days when astrology and alchemy permeated the beliefs of common people and were accepted by philosophers, magical mirrors were made of the so-called *electrum*, an alloy of the seven known metals. The metals named after the planets were thought to absorb and retain certain celestial influences, and hence a combination



of them was especially efficacious for producing magical effects ; a vessel made of this electrum immediately indicated the presence of any poisonous body introduced surreptitiously by beginning to sweat on the outside. Of this electrum were made amulets, charms, magic finger-rings (and these are still offered for sale in New York city), seals, figures, bells, medals, and mirrors.

The eminent iatro-chemist Paracelsus gives curious details for the preparation of this electrum : " Take ten parts of pure gold, ten of silver, five of copper, two of tin, two of lead, one part of powdered iron, and five of mercury. All these metals must be pure. Now wait for the hour when the planets Saturn and Mercury come into conjunction, and have all your preparations ready for that occasion ; have the fire, the crucible, the mercury, and the lead ready, so there will be no delay when the time of the conjunction arrives, for the work must be done during the moments of conjunction. As soon as this takes place, melt the lead and add the mercury, and let it cool. After this has been done, wait for a conjunction of Jupiter with Saturn and Mercury ; melt the compound of lead and mercury in a crucible, and in another crucible the tin, and pour the metals together at the moment of conjunction. You must now wait until a conjunction of the sun with either one or both of the above-named planets takes place, and then add the gold to the compound after melting it previously. At a time of the conjunction of the moon with the sun, Saturn, or Mercury, the silver is added likewise, and at a time of conjunction of Venus with one of the above-named planets the copper is added. Finally, at a time of such conjunction with Mars, the whole is completed by the addition of the powdered iron.<sup>1</sup> Stir the fluid mass with a dry rod of witch-hazel and let it cool."

" Of this electrum make three mirrors, each of the diameter of about two inches. They are to be founded at a time when a conjunction of Jupiter and Venus takes place, and moulds made of fine sand are to be used. Grind the mirrors smooth with a grindstone and polish them with tripoli, and with a piece of wood from a linden-tree. All these operations must be undertaken at favorable planetary aspects, and by selecting proper hours three different mirrors may be made. At a time of conjunction of two good planets, when at the same time the sun or the moon stands on the 'house of the lord of the hour of your birth,' the three mirrors are to be laid together into pure well-water, and left to remain there for one hour. Then remove them, envelop them in a linen cloth and preserve for use."

By the aid of such a mirror "you may see the events of the past and the present, absent friends or enemies, and see what they are

<sup>1</sup> In our solar system all these conjunctions take place in the course of thirteen months.

doing. You may see in it any object you desire to see, and all the doings of men in daytime or at night. You may see in it anything that has ever been written down, said, or spoken in the past, and also see the person who said it, and the causes that made him say what he did, and you may see in it anything, however secret it may have been kept."

In another place Paracelsus describes the way that witches use mirrors to cause the *pestis particularis* to appear on a man. "They sometimes take a mirror set in a wooden frame and put it into a tub of water, so that it will swim on the top, with its face directed towards the sky. On the top of the mirror and encircling the glass they lay a cloth saturated with catamenial blood, and thus they expose it to the influence of the moon; and this evil influence is thrown toward the moon, and, radiating again from the moon it may bring evil to those that love to look at the moon. The rays of the moon passing through the ring of blood become poisoned and poison the mirror, and the mirror throws back the poisoned ether into the atmosphere, and the moon and the mirror poison each other, in the same manner as two malicious persons, by looking at each other, poison each other's souls with their eyes. If a mirror is strongly poisoned in this manner the witch takes good care of it; and if she desires to injure some one she takes a waxen image made in his name; she surrounds it with a cloth spotted with the blood, and throws the reflex of the mirror through the opening in the middle upon the head of the figure, or upon some other part of its body, using at the same time her evil imagination and curses; and the man whom the image represents may then have his vitality dried up and his blood poisoned by that evil influence, and he may become diseased and his body covered with boils."

"But if a witch desires to poison a man with her eyes, she will go to a place where she expects to meet him. When he approaches she will look into the poisoned mirror, and then, after hiding the mirror, look into his eyes, and the influence of the poison passes from the mirror into her eyes, and from her eyes into the eyes of that person." Then follows the method by which the witch may cure her own eyes while her enemy becomes blind, but the details are too vulgar for reproduction. Indeed, I feel like apologizing for transcribing such rubbish; it illustrates the lowest phase of catoptromancy, and shows what depths degrading superstitions had reached in the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Paracelsus' mantology is obviously allied

<sup>1</sup> In a little volume published at London in 1657, Paracelsus is credited with an essay entitled "Urim and Thummim, shewed to be made by art, and are the same with the Universal Spirit, corporate and fixed." The treatise is mystical, and not suited to citation.



to the legend concerning Pythagoras, who wrote in blood on a mirror words that he caused to appear on the disk of the moon so they were legible at distant Constantinople.

Of crystallo-mancy there exist many curious details. Lilly, the English astrologer, describes a crystal thus: "It was as large as an orange, set in silver, with a cross at the top, and round about engraved the names of the angels Raphael, Gabriel, and Uriel. The method of consultation is this: the conjurer having repeated the necessary charms and adjurations, with the Litany, or invocation peculiar to the spirits he wishes to call (for each one has his particular form), the seer looks into the crystal or beryl, wherein he will see the answer, represented either by types or figures; and sometimes, though very rarely, will hear angels or spirits speak articulately. Their pronunciation," says Lilly, "is, like Irish, very much in the throat."

Charles Vallance writes thus: "In the Highlands of Scotland a large crystal of a figure somewhat oval was kept by the priests to work charms by; water poured upon it at this day is given to cattle against diseases; these stones are now preserved by the oldest and most superstitious in the country. They were once common in Ireland." Vallance wrote about 1800. You all remember the learned friend of Queen Elizabeth, Dr. John Dee, and his confederate in mischief, Edward Kelley. Dr. Dee claimed to have received a visit from the angel Uriel, who gave him a convex crystal, by the aid of which he could hold converse with the spirits of another world (1582). In using this, Dr. Dee was accustomed to concentrate all his faculties upon the crystal, and to dictate the revelations to Kelley. Sometimes, however, Kelley acted as the seer. To this Butler neatly refers in the couplet:—

Kelley did all his feats upon  
The devil's looking-glass, — a stone.

Dee's crystal, by the way, is preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, its magical properties being sadly neglected.

In 1626, about forty-four years later, another astrologer, John Lambe, a protégé of the notorious Duke of Buckingham, was attacked by a mob and fatally injured for calling up phantoms in a crystal glass, and for other acts of necromancy.

The English antiquary, Elias Ashmole, wrote in 1652 as follows: "By the magical or prospective stone, it is possible to discover any person in what part of the world soever, although never so secretly concealed or hid, in chambers, closets, or caverns of the earth, for there it makes strict inquisition; in a word, it fairly presents to your view even the whole world, wherein to behold, heare, or see

your desire. Nay, more, it enables man to understand the language of the creatures, as the chirping of birds, lowing of beasts, etc. To convey a spirit into an image, which, by observing the influence of the heavenly bodies, shall become a true oracle. And yet this is not in any wayes Necromantically or Devilish, but easy, wondrous easy, naturall and honest." (Theatr. chem. britt. 1652.)

These claims seem to us grotesque in the extreme, when regarded in the light of modern science, yet the art of crystallogomancy has its votaries to-day in the United States of America. A periodical published in Boston, Massachusetts, in the year of our Lord 1892, offers for sale "crystal balls, packed in a handsome plush case, with book of directions, for six dollars." And the advertisement quotes the testimony of Baron Reichenbach, who says: "The crystal affects persons magnetically, and hence produces temporary clairvoyance, which is probably the real pith of the matter."

In France, at a recent date, another method of practising catoptromancy prevailed: a child was blindfolded and a mirror held behind his head; in these extraordinary conditions the child interpreted by insight the appearances on the mirror.

In Egypt, even to-day, catoptromancy is sometimes used to detect a thief: a magician draws a magic square on the palm of a young boy's right hand, and then pours into the centre a little black ink, into which the boy's gaze is directed. The magician then burns incense, and bits of paper inscribed with charms, meanwhile calling for various objects to appear in the mirror of ink. The boy claims to see these objects, and eventually the features of the guilty one. (Lane's "Modern Egyptians," vol. ii.) Catoptromancy in various forms is practised by other Oriental nations. In India the Hindoos and Mahometans use a so-called "black lamp" to divine remedies for diseases.

Jerome Cardano, the celebrated Italian physician and mathematician, who died in 1576, wrote of "mirrors that reveal occult and secret things." He describes a combination of two Venetian looking-glasses, hinged at right angles to each other, and adjustable at any angle; "with these," he says, "one can see at a distance of 5,000 yards, even though walls intervene, what takes place in the interior of the town of an enemy without being disturbed by his artillery." It is evident, however, from other details, that Cardano refers to a scientific use of reflection rather than to magical arts. ("De Subtilitate," book iv.)

The secret use of scientific inventions for magical purposes has been discussed by Sir David Brewster in his "Letters on Natural Magic" addressed to Sir Walter Scott.

The so-called "magic mirrors" of China and Japan belong to the



class of scientific toys. They have the remarkable property of reflecting from their polished surfaces figures wrought upon the backs ; one of these mirrors held in the sunlight, with its face towards a white wall or screen, will reflect the designs on its back, either as shadows on a light ground or lights on a dark ground, although the designs are quite invisible upon the surface itself. Professor Ayrton, who made a study of these mirrors, has shown that the reflections are caused by certain imperceptible inequalities in the curvature of the polished surfaces. ("Chambers' J.," lvi., 591, 1879.) Quite recently Professor Silvanus P. Thompson, F. R. S., discussed this subject at a meeting of the Physical Society of London, confirming the views of Professors Ayrton and Perry, and describing some new experiments with the mirrors. ("Chem. News," lxxvii. 71, February 10, 1893.)

To explain on philosophical grounds the long-prevailing belief in a given superstition is either hopeless or useless. Some persons will prefer the hypnotic theory, others the theory of mental hallucination, and still others will resort to the erudition of metaphysicians ; that is to say, persons who discuss things they know nothing about in a language no one can understand. It is, however, not without interest to note that, as early as the fourteenth century, the Arabian historian Ibn Khaldoun attempted to explain the secret of catoptromancy as follows : —

"Sight is the most noble of all our senses, and is therefore preferred by those practising divination ; fixing their gaze on a plane surface, they regard it attentively until they see that which they wish to declare. The persons are mistaken in thinking they behold objects and visions in the mirror ; a kind of misty curtain intervenes between their eyes and the bright mirror, and on this appears the phantoms of their imagination."

The Society for Psychical Research is now studying the phenomena of "sensory automatism," and conjectures that "internal visualisation" may be automatic. For details of recent work in this field, I refer to the paper by Dr. Richard Hodgson on "Crystal Vision and the Subliminal Consciousness," read December 21, 1892, before the New York Section of the American Branch of the Society for Psychical Research ; also to the anonymous communication presented to the London Society, May 10, 1889. ("Proceedings Society Psychical Research," Part XIII.)

*H. Carrington Bolton.*

## SIGNS AND OMENS FROM NOVA SCOTIA.

THE following signs and omens I remember to have heard in my childhood in Nova Scotia. Of the nurses of whom they were obtained, some were of Scotch, others of French descent.

If raindrops stick to the window-pane,  
You can be sure it will rain again.  
If they run off as fast as they fall,  
In an hour it will not rain at all.

A cock crowing three times without flapping his wings denotes three successive days of rain.

Dew on the cobwebs at sunrise will bring rain at sunset.

A dry doorstep in the morning makes a wet one in the evening.

If the ice melts the first of January, it will freeze the first of April.

On seeing the first robin in spring, if you wish before it flies you will get what you desire. If it flies before you wish, you will meet with a misfortune.

If you wish to see your absent lover, the first time you go a-Maying pluck the first flower you see and breathe upon it three times, saying aloud :—

Flower pink, flower white,  
I wish to see my love to-night,

and he will be sure to come.

If you wish your sailor lad to think of you during his absence, bury some sea sand in your pansy bed, and water the flowers before the sun shines on them.

Hang two sprigs of evergreen on a wall; name one for your lover and the other for yourself. If they grow together you will marry. If they grow apart you will not.

If a drop of rain falls on a bride, or a tear on a new-born babe, they will go through life weeping.

Never rock an empty cradle unless you wish to be an old maid.

If you turn a loaf of bread top crust downward, some one will starve at sea.

*Mrs. C. V. Jamison.*

NEW ORLEANS, LA.





